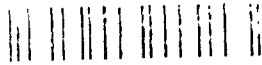


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DOCTRINE OR NOT? XVIII AIRBORNE CORPS MOVEMENT DURING OPERATION DESERT STORM

BY

Colonel Michael K. Shanahan
United States Army

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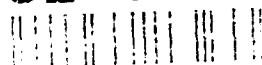
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DOCTRINE OR NOT? XVIII AIRBORNE CORPS MOVEMENT
DURING OPERATION DESERT STORM

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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On 17 January 1990, Operation *Desert Storm* began with an air campaign unequaled in modern warfare. At the same time the ground forces of the coalition began to reposition themselves far to the west of their previous positions. This movement was definitely the largest to be conducted since World War II and quite possibly the largest ever conducted by the United States Army. It was the prelude to General Schwarzkopf's "Hail Mary" operation to fix and defeat the Iraqi army in Kuwait. XVIII Airborne Corps successfully participated in that movement but that success was not without problems. Throughout the planning stage the Corps adhered to doctrine. Yet as the move began doctrine became irrelevant. Command and control dissolved as units rushed to get to their attack positions. Success was achieved due to the absence of any hostile threats and the keep them rolling attitude of the commanders on the ground.

INTRODUCTION

On 17 January 1991, the United States along with coalition forces from 35 other countries attacked Iraq and Iraqi forces which were occupying the country of Kuwait. This attack, the beginning of Operation Desert Storm (ODS), was comprised of air strikes throughout the operational area. Concurrently with the start of the air campaign the XVIII Airborne Corps began one of the largest tactical road movements ever attempted by the US Army.

The XVIII Airborne Corps mission was to move from its defensive positions, almost 600 miles to the northwest, into its final attack positions, between Hafar al Batin and Rafhah, Saudi Arabia, and be prepared to attack into Iraq, in order to free Kuwait and defeat the Iraqi Army, in sector. General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr., Commander-in-Chief, US Central Command (USCENTCOM), said "I can't recall any time in the annals of military history when this number of forces have moved over this distance to put themselves in a position to be able to attack...."¹

This paper will examine existing US Army doctrine for movement control and then compare the planning, execution, and control of the XVIII Airborne Corps move in the context of that doctrine. It will highlight the problems encountered by the

Corps and its subordinate units, detail the changes made to accommodate unique situations, and evaluate what worked and what did not. And finally it will propose some recommendations for the future that could improve the effectiveness of future operations.

THE THEORY OF MOVEMENT CONTROL

The doctrine for US Army planning of movement control can be found primarily in Field Manuals 55-1, Army Transportation Services In A Theater Of Operations, of 30 November 1984, and 55-10, Movement Control In A Theater Of Operations, of 22 July 1986. Although other manuals will refer to movement control and provide some guidelines in that area, these two manuals contain the majority of Army doctrine at this time. The doctrine provides for a centrally-managed hierarchy of organizations to achieve several goals through the application of a few basic principles.

A theater army will normally have a movement control agency (MCA) assigned to it "to provide movement management and highway regulation for the theater army."² The MCA is supposed to ensure that the four principles of movement are incorporated into theater plans: First movement will be centrally managed. This principle requires control of movements at the highest level at which it can be done adequately. Second movements will be

regulated to reflect changes in the transportation net. Third movements will be fluid and flexible, to provide an uninterrupted flow of traffic and adjust rapidly to changing situations. And finally maximum use will be made of carrying capacity. This principle, which permeates the entire field of transportation movements, aims at full use of all the components and modes of the system.³

At the corps level a movement control center (MCC) provides "centralized movement management and highway regulation".⁴ The mission of the MCC is to: First command and supervise attached or assigned units and teams engaged in movement control and highway regulation. Second provide movement control for moving personnel and material (except bulk fuel by pipeline) within, into, or out of the area of responsibility. Third provide highway regulation services within the command's area of operation. And finally maintain liaison, as required, with transportation elements of other US forces and with allied and host nation transportation agencies.⁵

At the bottom of the hierarchy are specialized teams. To assist the MCC in accomplishing its mission the MCC will have attached to it movement control teams (MCT). MCTs can serve several different functions, but the ones usually found at the corps level are air terminal movement control teams (ATMCT) and highway regulating point teams (HRPT).

HRPTs will normally come under the highway traffic division

(HTD) of the MCC. HRPTs are placed at critical points along main supply routes (MSR) to fulfill several goals. These teams carry out the traffic regulation plan, and report road and convoy status.⁶ They can also convey information to the convoy commander -- especially relaying to him any new information that may be important concerning road conditions or enemy threats.

The highway regulation plan is the backbone of movement planning and control. It is prepared by the HTD and "...is based on operational plans, general route and traffic information, terminals and other facilities, and availability of communications equipment."⁷ In order to develop this plan, the HTD must coordinate with several different agencies. These include the G3 (Operations Officer) to determine the operational plans, the Engineer for road data, and the Military Police for control measures that may be needed. "Management is the function of the HTD and its field offices (highway regulating points)."⁸

Once the highway regulation plan is completed the HTD can begin traffic routing, which is the planning of highway movement over designated routes. Three fundamentals govern routing; balance, separation and distribution.⁹ Essentially routing means that vehicles are matched to road conditions as much as possible by taking into account speed, type road, and the number of vehicles traveling over the road network. Like vehicles go on the same roads if possible.

In conducting its traffic routing responsibilities the HTD

follows certain principles. These principles are: To route traffic from its origin by the way of predetermined intermediate locations to destination. Second assign highest priority traffic to routes that provide the minimum amount of time to reach the final destination. Third consider the capabilities of roads and bridges for sustained operations when assigning movements to routes. Finally separate slow motor movements from fast ones. This is done by assigning different times for each according to its respective march capabilities."¹⁰

After determining the proper routes for required convoys based on the functions and principles of traffic routing, the HTD is ready to begin traffic scheduling. Traffic scheduling is exactly that -- determining times that convoys will start their movement on the various MSRs. Scheduling is necessary for several reasons. To give priority to units according to the commander's directives or to units moving the greatest distance.

To minimize delays, conflicts, and congestion by ensuring that traffic flow never exceeds the capacity of the most limiting feature (most severe bottleneck) of the route and by reducing peak traffic by spreading the flow. To provide detailed regulation of special or high priority individual movements. To promote security and passive defense when air superiority is not achieved by scheduling movements during hours of darkness. To restrict traffic to road capabilities to permit necessary highway maintenance. To maintain cognizance of all convoys so that at

any time they can be rerouted, diverted, used to meet emergencies, or held to permit passage of priority movements.¹¹ In planning a large-scale road movement proper scheduling is the most important function performed by the HTD.

By using the existing doctrine as outlined above, the MCA and the MCC should be well on their way to planning and controlling any movement required during military operations. So the question is, did execution adhere to doctrine in planning the movement of XVIII Airborne Corps units, and were the responsible agencies able to exercise control during execution of the plan?

THE REALITY OF MOVEMENT CONTROL: PLANNING

The doctrine as it is written assumes a mature theater of operations with all operational units already in place or at least already in the chain of command and planning cycle. This was not the case in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. US Central Command (USCENTCOM) had no units in Saudi Arabia before 8 August 1990. The entire troop list had to be developed, and units had to be deployed based on need and availability. Because many combat service support units are in the Army Reserves and the President did not exercise his authority to mobilize all required forces immediately, some of the initial planning that normally would have been accomplished at the Theater level was done by Corps or lower echelons.

The XVIII Airborne Corps realized immediately upon being placed on alert that the movement of the corps, both to and within the area of operation (AOR), was paramount to mission success. Accordingly the 330th Movement Control Center had personnel ready to deploy immediately; and in fact, seventeen members of the 330th deployed on 8 August 1990 (C+1).¹²

Since the theater MCA had not been activated by then and, in fact, would not be in country for another two months, the responsibility for all movement control planning fell to the 330th. Besides planning for the reception of all personnel and equipment, the 330th also planned for their follow-on movement to their assembly areas or defensive positions. In doing all this, one of the 330th's first accomplishments included identifying and establishing the theater main supply route (MSR) network.

In establishing this MSR network, the 330th fell back on some past experiences. During July 1990, Central Command conducted Command Post Exercise (CPX) Internal Look 90. This exercise used the Arabian peninsula as its operating area and gave the 330th MCC some familiarity with the road network of Saudi Arabia.¹³ Although this experience certainly helped, another factor played an important part in actual operations. Saudi Arabia does not have an extensive road network. Some freeways comparable to US interstates exist, but most roads are "simple macadam highway barely qualifying as two-lane country roads".¹⁴ So, quite often, there is only one way to go to get to

the desired location anyway.

Another lesson learned by the 330th from the July exercise may have been even more important. This concerned the naming of the MSRs. Normally within the US Army MSRs are named after colors. A problem develops when the engineers and the military police start reporting on the condition of the MSRs and use the colors of green, amber, or red to identify the capability of the road to bear traffic. To alleviate the likely confusion that may have resulted the 330th named the MSRs after automobiles and used each letter of the alphabet only once.¹⁵ So the road network came to consist primarily of MSR Audi, which ran from Dhahran north to Kuwait; MSR Dodge, which ran northwest from Abu Hadriyah to beyond Rafhah; MSR Toyota which ran southwest from Dhahran to beyond Riyadh; and MSR Mercedes which ran north from MSR Toyota to MSR Dodge.

The 318th Transportation Agency (Movement Control) was activated on 20 September 1990 and arrived in Saudi Arabia in early October. Throughout Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the 318th functioned as the theater army movement control agency.¹⁶

With the arrival of the 318th MCA in October of 1990, the 330th turned over the responsibility of theater movement control and planning to them. Shortly thereafter, Central Command began to plan for offensive operations. With that the size and complexity of movement control rapidly increased. The offensive plan called for another corps to be in-country and VII Corps

began its deployment from Europe. While coordinating the arrival and onward movement of the VII Corps units to their assembly areas, the 318th also began their planning on how to support the movement of XVIII Airborne Corps to their attack positions.

Through this coordination the 318th learned that in order for the ground forces to be in position for the ground attack a major road movement was required. Raw numbers help convey the scale of this task: To support the envelopment required the relocation of both US Army corps tasked-organized with more than 190,000 soldiers. British and French contingents included nearly 45,000 soldiers. There were more than 95,000 trucks and other wheeled vehicles, and more than 12,000 tanks and armored personnel vehicles requiring their own heavy lift. The plan also called for a 60-day stockage level of most classes of supplies, which required extensive movement to the logistics support bases for pre-positioning.¹⁷

Operational security (OPSEC) imposed additional demands. Movement had to be accomplished without letting the Iraqis know what was happening. General Schwarzkopf had an elaborate deception plan, and deception was a key element in the total operation.¹⁸

Iraq had a formidable army that, for several months, had been preparing elaborate defensive positions. If General Schwarzkopf could deceive the Iraqis into believing that he was going to attack straight into the heart of their defenses, he

felt like he might have a good chance to defeat the Iraqis and, at the same time, reduce casualties on his own side.

To maintain operational security, moves could not begin until the air campaign had commenced. Even then, movements had to be made, to the maximum extent possible, during darkness.¹⁹

In practice, these limitations proved unworkable. The first limitation was adhered to, and the XVIII Airborne Corps did not begin its movement until the start of the air campaign on the morning of 17 January 1991. The second limitation, of traveling during the hours of darkness, was impossible to follow. As everybody was quick to learn, it would take every hour of every available day to get the Corps units into place.

In keeping with current doctrine, the 330th saw its mission to consist primarily of: Command and Control of the multifunctional movement control teams (MCT) allocated to the Corps Support Groups and the Corps MCC. Tasking authority for the motor transport assets assigned to the Corps support area. Highway regulation of the main supply routes in the Corps area of responsibility. And finally to maintain liaison with 1st Corps Support Command, XVIII Airborne Corps, the 318th Movement Control Agency, and Allied/Host Nation transport agencies.²⁰

As the 330th reviewed the MSR network it was readily apparent that MSR Dodge would be the preeminent MSR of Desert Storm. It roughly paralleled the Saudi-Iraqi border for hundreds of miles, in some places almost touching the border, and in many

places, within range of Iraqi artillery.²¹ It was also readily apparent that MSR Dodge could not handle all of the traffic that had to move west. Because of this the 330th requested that another route be identified. So the 318th designated a new MSR called Sultan which ran from Riyadh north to Hafar al Batin.

Now there were two routes for the XVIII Airborne Corps to use. The northern route which consisted of MSRs Audi and Dodge, and the southern route which consisted of MSRs Toyota and Sultan. These two routes converged at Hafar al Batin and from that point on to Rafhah MSR Dodge was the only available MSR.

From Dhahran to Rafhah was approximately 500 miles along the northern route and almost 700 miles along the southern route. Initially life support areas were nonexistent along these MSRs. But to support the endless movement of more than 3,500 convoys, nine convoy support centers (CSC) were constructed along the way. One approximately every 150 miles. These CSCs, like refueling on the move (ROM) sites as outlined in current doctrine, were capable of refueling hundreds of trucks an hour, each dispensing almost 100,000 gallons of fuel a day.²² But unlike ROM sites these CSCs also served as a rest halt for the drivers and as a place to, quite often, get a hot meal before moving on.

With the MSRs identified and the CSCs in place, the 330th MCC was able to begin their planning for operation Desert Storm. They started their planning in early December of 1990 with a goal of publishing a Corps movement plan before the start of the air

campaign.

Four main pieces of information were essential to a workable movement plan. One was how much road space that XVIII Airborne Corps would get on any day from Echelons Above Corps (EAC). Second was identifying what equipment-- HETS, lowboys and flatbeds-- would be available from EAC to augment 1st Corps Support Command (COSCOM) assets. Third was getting an accurate listing from the division transportation officers (DTOs) and separate-brigade S-4s (Logistics Officers) of their total requirements, which included external lift as well as organic vehicles. Finally, a complete priority-of-move listing from the Corps G-3 was required. Once all of these factors were known, a detailed Corps movement plan could be published.²³

Developing and applying this information would not be easy. Although one of the initial limiting factors had been to move as much as possible during the hours of darkness, the 318th soon realized that would be impossible. The requirements of the XVIII Airborne Corps and the VII Corps, along with the resupply requirements of EAC units, dictated that convoys be moving 24 hours a day. Of these 24 hours the 318th allowed the XVIII Airborne Corps 16 hours of road use daily.²⁴ But 16 hours a day would prove insufficient to meet the Corps requirements, so the 330th planned for supply convoys to use infiltration as a means to get supplies forward.

To determine how much external transportation from EAC would

be needed for XVIII Airborne Corps units, the 330th first had to get transportation requirements from the subordinate units of the Corps. Doing so was not easy. Although the Corps Commander had put out guidance that units would go to war lean and mean, this did not translate into fewer support vehicles. Along with large requests came numerous changes, which continued throughout the move.²⁵ Inflated planning and occasional shortages of transportation assets seemed to lose the lean and mean concept, which was found again in actual execution.²⁶

The priority of movement was easier to work out than requirements. First priority went to the combat units. On the Northern route, the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) would move first to be the Corps screening force. The 24th Infantry Division (ID) would follow. In the South, the 101st Air Assault Division (AASLT) would move simultaneously with the 3rd ACR and be followed by the 82nd Airborne.²⁷ The problems started once the 330th tried to get a priority for the rest of the Corps units. Every unit had its reasons for needing to be first to move. Quite often it was impossible to get the Corps G-3 to establish reasonable priorities. Eventually priorities were established and a movement plan was published on time.

As it got closer to D-Day the 330th decided that it would be close to impossible to control the movement of all of these convoys without some type of command and control on each MSR. In response the 1st COSCOM task organized a command cell for each

MSR. The cell consisted of a headquarters element from a subordinate Corps Area Support Group (ASG). Attached to that headquarters element for direct taskings were a Military Police battalion, a helicopter detachment, a civil affairs team, a ambulance team, and highway regulation point teams (HRPT). The primary responsibility of each cell was to ensure that XVIII Airborne Corps convoys moved along the MSR with the minimum of problems and in accordance with the movement plan.

Another matter that created some problems, due to weather, was the movement of VII Corps from their tactical assembly area to their attack positions without interfering with the movement of XVIII Airborne Corps. The movement of VII Corps required them to cross MSR Sultan just south of Hafar al Batin and then move north across MSR Dodge. These movements threatened to cause massive traffic jams, as XVIII ABN Corps convoys moved north and west. Plans were made to build a bypass south and west of King Khalid Military City and the VII Corps' crossing site, and engineers were committed to this project. The effort was futile. Just days before the first convoys were expected to use the bypass unusual rains turned it into a quagmire that defied all efforts to make the bypass serviceable.²⁰

Something very similar to this also occurred along MSR Dodge, which was only a two lane road and not very wide. A parallel road to be used by traffic heading in a easterly direction was never used because of the heavy rains in that area.

The final planning factor to be discussed here is the Iraqi threat. Essentially the Iraqi threat was fourfold. First, Iraq had a formidable air force with modern Soviet fighters and bombers, quite capable of flying into Saudi Arabia and attacking the convoys as they travelled along the MSRs. The second was the biological and chemical threat that Iraq possessed and could deliver with SCUD missiles. The third was the Iraqi artillery, which could range portions of MSR Dodge from their defensive positions. Fourth was the terrorist threat, and the problems that could cause to convoys and fuel points along the MSRs.

The command hoped that, by not starting the move until the air campaign had begun, that the threat from Iraqi air would be reduced or even eliminated. It was also hoped that traveling during the hours of darkness would help, since the Iraqi aircraft did not have the night time capability of US aircraft. Chemical and biological ammunition storage sites were primary targets, as were SCUD missile sites and Iraqi Army defensive locations. The Saudi government had a pretty good handle on terrorist organizations within the country. As D-Day approached, the civilian police paid more attention to the movement of the nomadic Bedouins who inhabited the areas along the MSRs.

By the time that D-Day arrived the 330th MCC had completed the Movement Control Plan and was prepared to execute that plan. Up until this time almost all of the planning had been done according to current doctrine. The only real deviation was in

the establishment of the Task Forces to provide the command and control along the northern and southern routes. "The move was originally planned to take 16 days to complete."²⁹ But did the move go according to plan and was it successful?

THE REALITY OF MOVEMENT CONTROL: EXECUTION

The movement of the XVIII Airborne Corps was highly successful but did not occur without its share of problems and a little bit of luck. It took 21 days, instead of 16 days but used considerably fewer assets than originally expected. The success was greater in that the 330th Movement Control Center, along with other agencies, executed an unprecedented mission, using untested methods and concepts.³⁰

The Iraqi threat never materialized. The coalition air forces immediately gained complete control of the skies thus eliminating any threat from the Iraqi Air Force. At the same time SCUD launch sites were being hit by friendly air, the Iraqis determined that the SCUDs that they did fire would serve a better purpose if fired at population centers as opposed to lines of communications. Iraqi artillery was never targeted at the MSR's. Terrorists, if there were any, never attempted to disrupt the move of troops and equipment to their final attack positions.

That the threat never materialized was lucky for the units making the move; because, at the same time, the 330th's control of

movement started to collapse. As soon as units began to realize that movement was pretty much unrestricted, they began to send out small convoys -- ten vehicles or less -- to infiltrate to their attack positions. Many units that were completely mobile moved entirely by infiltration and were able to complete their move days in advance of schedule. The 330th had not planned on this possibility and had no control over the dates or the times that units began moving.

Infiltration caused some problems for the command and control elements along the MSRs also. Since the infiltrating units did not move in accordance with the movement plan it was hard to identify who they were and where they were going. If a vehicle broke down and was left behind, it became extremely difficult to get it married back up with its unit again, unless the unit came back for it. This process often took several days.

Infiltration also caused the MSRs to become jammed with traffic at times, so that a traffic accident could back up traffic for miles before a military policeman could arrive and deconflict the jam.

Another important element in the lack of proper command and control along the MSRs was the inadequate communications support at all levels within the operation. Essentially all any unit or organization had for communications support was their internal communications assets. The 330th MCC was not able to close the gap. Organic MCC communications systems simply could not bridge

great distances.³¹

As the operation continued, it became evident the the most reliable communications system was that of the military police. The military police had established a network of relay stations along the MSRs. In this way the company commanders could stay in contact with their patrols and with their battalion headquarters.

The battalion headquarters were colocated with the task force headquarters and maintained contact with their brigade headquarters through the use of their radioteletype. The convoy support centers (CSC) relied on the MP FMs to relay information to the Northern and Southern task force headquarters.³² This solution was not at all the ideal. It significantly impaired the timely reporting of convoy movements. It would literally take hours to relay a message along the MSR to a command headquarters that could make a decision. The return message would take just as long. Also this arrangement slowed MP responses to traffic delays and emergencies.³³ In effect, once a convoy got started on a MSR it was lost until it reached its final destination. Experience showed that real control was possible only in conjunction with other control mechanisms, such as marshalling areas.³⁴

At this point, priorities of traffic control and logistical management conflicted, and traffic control lost. The two task forces that were given the responsibility to provide command and control for this movement never understood their mission or the

criticality of it. The commanders of each task force were logisticians and were more concerned with their missions of supporting the tactical units once the attack got under way. So, reporting of the traffic flow proved to be of higher priority than actual traffic control as the mission developed.¹⁶

Once it was determined that the threat to the road networks and the convoys was nonexistent it was decided that the most important thing was to keep the traffic moving regardless of assigned movement priorities. As long as the traffic was moving, everyone would reach their destination and no one would be delayed for any measurable amount of time.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The movement of the XVIII Airborne Corps, from its defensive positions over more than 600 miles to its attack position in 21 days, was nothing short of a tremendous achievement. The planning that went into this operation was nothing short of outstanding. Planning, which began at the theater army level and continued on at the corps level, at all times, as nearly as possible, followed current Army doctrine. Yet in the final analysis, when the time to execute arrived, the plan was quickly cast aside in favor of expeditious movement.

The operation did have its problems, which primarily centered around the command and control of the operation once it

started. True control of the MSRs was never achieved by the 330th MCC or its subordinate units during this operation. This situation arose mainly from two factors: The adhoc organization put together to provide the command and control, and the lack of adequate communications equipment.

Quite likely, for many years to come, movement control specialists will study this operation for how to properly plan and execute a major unit movement in a hostile environment. They should do so with a sense of lessons, both positive and negative, and with a keen awareness of the caution needed in applying lessons of Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm to the future.

Success, in part, was possible because a real threat from the Iraqis never occurred. So, control of the MSRs never became a major issue. For the most part, traffic flowed unimpeded and the real mission for those units on the ground supervising the movement was to keep everything moving as fast as possible while preventing accidents.

As the Army trains for future wars it could improve its movement control over that seen during Operation Desert Storm by correcting three areas. First, provide sufficient communications equipment to the command and control elements to allow them to accomplish their mission in a timely manner. Second, do not modify the existing command and control structure by placing headquarters into the chain that are not trained in how to control these type operations. Finally, require tactical units

to get involved in training on how to move over long distances
and how the command and control functions during those moves.

ENDNOTES

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³¹Ibid., 22-4.

³²16th Military Police Brigade (Airborne), Operation Desert Storm Historical Summary (Fort Bragg NC) 20 (hereafter referred to as 16th MP BDE Desert Storm Summary).

³³Ibid.

³⁴1st COSCOM AAR, 22-13.

³⁵Ibid.

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